

17 FEB 2003

Mahathir-Badminton

DR M CONGRATULATES HAFIZ FOR ALL-ENGLAND WIN

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today congratulated Muhammad Hafiz Hashim for winning the All-England men's singles badminton title, Malaysia's first in 37 years.

"Thank God, I am thankful and very happy indeed that Hafiz not only can hafal but also can play badminton (well). Congratulations and best wishes," the Prime Minister said.

"Hafiz" in Arabic means "hafal" or to effectively perform the duties one has been entrusted with.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to comment on Hafiz's triumph at badminton's premier tournament in Birmingham yesterday. He was speaking at a news conference after witnessing a rehearsal for the opening ceremony of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

The 20-year-old Nusa Mahsuri shuttler stunned topseed and defending champion Chen Hong of China 17-14, 15-10 in the final. Tan Aik Huang was the last Malaysian to win the men's singles crown in 1966.

Saying Hafiz had played excellently, Dr Mahathir hoped that no one would spoil him by rewarding him excessively.

"Now, I would like to request everybody not to spoil him, and you've seen earlier as (to) what they have done to the previous champions, because you spoiled them.

"I hope the states would not give five acres of land, money worth one million, after that (the recipient) could no longer play badminton. Keep on seeing land...money, land...money, five million, three million, one billion," said Dr Mahathir, gesturing with his hand to hit a shuttlecock.

Previously, national badminton players had been given various incentives, including land and money, for winning major tournaments. However, many people feel that the rewards had made them complacent and caused their performances to decline.

Meanwhile, Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) patron Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali described Hafiz's success as "surprising but wonderful".

"It is wonderful that he won...very surprising. But he is a young player who is full of stamina. I'm very proud of him that he won the tournament after 37 years," she said when met while accompanying Dr Mahathir to the rehearsal.

-- BERNAMA

HS MAM YBY